

Competency/Standards-based Grading Frequently Asked Questions - DRAFT

Why are we spending a year analyzing standards-based grading and reporting rather than establishing a firm implementation timeline?

Some teachers in the district have already implemented a more “standards-based” or “competency-based” grading approach. Other teachers have expressed an interest in this change. We want all stakeholders to learn more and ask questions about the differences between standards-based and traditional grading before deciding on the next steps.

Why is this change being considered?

1. Improved communication across courses/grades through grading. A “B+” in one class may mean a student has aced every test, but did not turn in an assignment or project. In another class a “B+” may mean that a student has demonstrated 88% of the big ideas.
2. Additional feedback for students, teachers and parents. Grade books in a competency/standards-based system report student progress based on specific learning targets rather than assessments or assignments.
3. It supports the idea of “assessment *for* learning,” one of the characteristics of effective instruction in the Iowa Core. When a student receives a project or quiz score of “90%” but may be achieving at a low level on an individual standard. With a grading system that clearly communicates a student’s specific strengths and weaknesses, students and teachers have a better understanding of the next steps they need to study, re-teach, re-learn and overcome previous misconceptions.

What is the difference between competency/standards-based grading and existing grading practices?

Traditional grades may reflect the percentage of items that a student got correct and are sometimes influenced by non-academic issues. Standards-based grading differs in that the grade reflects mastery of a specific standard versus only percentage of items correct. Some teachers at the middle school and high school have already started using a standards-based grading philosophy. Teachers in grades K-4 have used this type of system for years. See the table on the next page for a more detailed comparison.

What does standards-based grading look like?

Traditional Grading System	Standards-Based Grading System
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Based on assessment methods (quizzes, tests, homework, projects, etc.). One grade/entry is given per assessment.2. Assessments are based on a percentage system. Criteria for success may be	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Based on learning goals and performance standards. One grade/entry is given per learning goal.2. Standards are criterion or

<p>unclear.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Use an uncertain mix of assessment, achievement, effort and behavior to determine the final grade. May use late penalties and extra credit. 4. Everything goes in the grade book - regardless of purpose. 5. Include every score, regardless of when it was collected. Assessments record the average - not the best - work. 	<p>proficiency-based. Criteria and targets are made available to students ahead of time.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Measures achievement only OR separates achievement from effort/behavior. No penalties or extra credit given. 4. Selected assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.) are used for grading purposes. 5. Emphasize the most recent evidence of learning when grading.
---	--

Adapted from O'Connor K (2002). *How to Grade for Learning: Linking grades to standards (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Traditional Grade Book (Assignments/assessments-based)

Chapter 3 Test 02/20/2009 pts: 44	Computation W.. 02/20/2009 pts: 24	Computation Q.. 02/23/2009 pts: 24	Chapter 4 HW 03/05/2009 pts: 27	Chapter 4 Test 03/05/2009 pts: 40	Chapter 5 HW 03/11/2009 pts: 12	Chapter 5 Test 03/11/2009 pts: 24	Portfolio Check? 03/12/2009 pts: 10	Quiz 6.1-5 03/26/2009 pts: 16
43	24	20	31	40	12	22	10	13.5
42.5	24	18	29	40	12	24	10	15
33	9	17	16	30	11	18	8	10
35	24	15	26	30	12	18	10	12.5
35	4	7	14	33	3	24	5	11
44	22	19	31	36	12	21	10	12.5
35	17	19	28	38	12	23	9	15
44	24	23	32	41	12	22	10	15.5
84% 43	24	23	31	35	12	22	8	14.5
33	15	16	31	38	12	23	10	15
43	18	24	31	36	12	23	10	14
43	23	21	32	40	12	24	6	14.5
36.5	15	13	28	40	12	22	8	13

Entries in the grade book are based on specific assessments or assignments.

Standards-based Grade Book

ActiveGrade						
Geometry ▾ Gradebook Group Assessment Reports Config ▾						
Gradebook						
Grading period: All grades for all standards and dates [?] Quick Stats [E]						
		#1: classify angles b	#2: identify the num	#3: compute areas o	#4: compute volume	#5: translate shapes
Antonio Palmore	C	2	4	3	4	4
Arden Brien	C	3.4	4	2	4	4
Benjamin Palmer	C	1.2	4	1.4	4	4
Bertha Royston	C	3	4	1.5	4	4
Bruce Deyer	C	4	4	1.4	4	4
Chris Gwin	C	1	4	0.8	4	4
Danielle Mullin	C	3	4	2.3	4	4
Dennis Turk	C	2	2.1	1	1.9	1.3
Douglas Alpert	C	3.6	4	1.5	4	4
Eleanor Delano	C	4	4	1.5	4	4
Ellen Muncy	C	3.4	3.7	1.9	3.3	3.3

Time to revisit
this topic!

Entries in the grade book list the competency/standard (learning goal) name or number.

How does this impact Van Meter Elementary report cards?

Van Meter Elementary reports students' levels of understanding already on its report cards. The standards on the report cards may eventually change due to implementation of the required Iowa Core essential concepts and skills, however the process of reporting student learning will remain the same.

Does this mean the district is eliminating letter grades?

No, the intent is to provide more feedback for parents and students through letter grades. The intent is also to create more equity in letter grades. This does not include eliminating letter grades at this time.

How does this impact students?

Students are required to take more ownership of their learning. They can look in the grade book and see areas where they are doing well and areas they need to improve. The course's "big ideas" are no longer hidden behind the name of a project, worksheet or test. Students who understand concepts and skills without needed additional practice are not penalized for skipping this work. Similarly, students who need additional time, practice and/or instruction are not penalized by the averaging of assignment scores over time.

How might this impact parents?

Currently, parents may log on to JMC and see an assignment or assessment score such as 10/12. This does not necessarily tell parents the specific concepts, skills or ideas his or her child is doing well in or needs to improve. In competency/standards-based grading, parents will be able to see specific competencies/standards a student has demonstrated a thorough understanding and well as standards a student has not yet learned at a high level. At any given time, parents will be able to read the big ideas students are studying as well as their student's current level of understanding.

How will this affect the distribution of grades?

In a competency/standards-based system, students study and learn because they know their current levels of understanding. In an assessments-based system, students study and complete assignments, because they're told to do so. A competency/standards-based system has the potential to motivate students to learn at high levels. We do not anticipate seeing any long-term changes in GPA, however we do believe quarter and semester grades in a competency/standards-based system will be a better reflection of student learning.

How does the conversation change between students and teachers when using a standards-based grading approach?

TRADITIONAL SYSTEM:

Student: How do I raise my grade?

Teacher: You have several options: Your first option is to complete the extra credit which will be assigned next week. Your second option is to do well on the next test. Your third option is to turn in the assignment you was due last week, but only for partial credit.

COMPETENCY/STANDARDS-BASED SYSTEM:

Student: How do I raise my grade?

Teacher: Your grade reflects your current level of understanding. In order to raise your grade, you need to demonstrate a higher level of understanding on future assessments. You may also learn more about current standards in the grade book and re-assess in these areas. New levels

of understanding will replace old levels of understanding in the grade book.

What was the process leading up to considering this change?

2009-2010

- Secondary teachers began having discussions on what grades actually measured.

2010-2011

- Van Meter secondary staff members engaged in professional development around standards-based grading practices. This study included reading articles and blogs while dedicating PLC time learning more about standards-based grading.
- The staff was surveyed during the spring of 2011 and agreed that SBG is something it wanted to pursue.

2011-2012

- As the state indicated it was supporting competency based pathways, it was decided that instead of using the term standards-based, Van Meter Secondary would use Competency-based grading.
- The Building Leadership Team agreed on a goal of each teacher applying this grading philosophy in at least one class for the 11-12 school year. A building goal around this idea was established.
- Each teacher is implementing a competency-based grading system in one of their classes for the 11-12 school year.
- Building PD is focused on providing support to implementing this system.
- Regular communication is taking place with students and parents via, class syllabi, email, letters, the weekly administrator update, Bulldog Brief, individual discussions and blogs.
- Admin team is working on providing more support for teachers and community.
- Presentation to the School Board in November 2011
- Future steps being discussed include a resource page on the website for community members to review and parent forums to discuss it in more detail.

Where can I read more about changes in grading practices?

Earl, L. M. (2003). *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2007). *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for your Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Guskey, T. R., & Bailey, J. M. (2001). *Developing Grading and Reporting Systems for Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Marzano, R. J. (2006). *Classroom Assessment & Grading that Work*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Marzano, R. J. (2010). *Formative Assessment & Standards-Based Grading*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

O'Connor, K. (2009). *How to Grade for Learning, K-12* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Wormeli, R. (2006). *Fair Isn't Always Equal*. Portland: Stenhouse.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this change?

- Any secondary teacher or administrator